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BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

ERNST VON WILDENBRUCH AND HIS HISTORICAL DRAMAS

Submitted by

Thomas Franklin Wight

(B. B. A., B. U., 1928)

In partial fulfilment of requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts

1932

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## Outline

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  - c) Dramatic Background.
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  - a) Historical Background.
  - b) Literary Background.
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- II. Ernst v. Wittenberg. (1848-1910)
  - a) Biographical Sketch.
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    - 5) "Die Götter"
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I. INTRODUCTION (1800-1870)

a) Historical Background.

One of the leading dramatists of the latter part of the nineteenth century was Ernst v. Wildenbruch. His first work, "Dionville", appeared in 1874, and his last, "Die Letzte Partie", in 1909. Thus he wrote over a span of thirty-seven years, the most critical years in German development. Had he been born ten years earlier, and had his plays appeared a decade earlier, it is quite conceivable that he would have thrown the entire German nation into a state of excitement, and for us his plays would not have been relegated to a paragraph or two in literary histories.

A study of Ernst v. Wildenbruch requires a study of his times. A study, not with the stethoscope of psychological analysis, not with the yardstick of Realism, but with a sympathetic and understanding enthusiasm for what he was trying to do. That he leaves us unmoved today does not mean that his influence was felt only by the "Stubengelehrten" of his day. He is a product of his times, divorced from which his



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a) Historical Background.

One of the leading dramatists of the latter part of the nineteenth century was Ernst v. Wildenbruch. His first work, "Hohenlilien", appeared in 1874, and his last, "Die Leichte Felle", in 1908. Thus he wrote over a span of thirty-seven years, the most critical years in German development. Had he been born ten years earlier, and had his plays appeared decades earlier, it is quite conceivable that he would have known the entire German nation into a state of excitement, and for us his plays would not have been relegated to a paragraph or two in literary histories.

A study of Ernst v. Wildenbruch requires a study of his times. A study, not with the microscope of psychological analysis, nor with the yardstick of Realism, but with a sympathetic and understanding enthusiasm for what he was trying to do. That he leaves us unmoved today does not mean that his influence was felt only by the "Kulturkrieger" of his day. He is a product of his times, divorced from which



his works become a blatant piece of rhetoric.

After the battle of Waterloo and the banishment of Napoleon, which had been brought about by the alliance of England, Prussia, and Austria, the German states were far from united. The North German Confederation, to be sure, possessed a semblance of unity. The French, who had been wont to treat Prussia and her allied states with a strangely misplaced contempt, felt for them, after the campaigns of Leipzig and Waterloo, a hatred not less bitter than that which they felt toward England. The deliverance from the vassalage of France was far more the work of the people than the work of the king and court. Prussia's unparalleled success in this respect tended to strengthen and glorify the Prussian monarchy in the eyes of Germany, and gave her the opportunity of placing herself at the head of the nation.

On the other hand, we have the Rhenish Confederation which had been aggrandized by Napoleon and included Bavaria and Wurtemberg. Saxony had adhered to the Napoleonic standard



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throughout. While the assistance these states could give the French emperor was small, they presented a difficult problem for the Congress of Vienna to settle.

The leaders at Vienna had misjudged the the causes of the entire Napoleonic regime, and the guiding principle of the Congress was reaction. The interests of the German people as opposed to the princes were ignored or forgotten and the Act of Confederation, adopted in June 1815, was in all its main features the constitution which remained in force down to 1866. It contained only the feeblest provisions for the concession of popular rights and the establishment of representative institutions in the several states.

Meanwhile the German liberals labored under the immense difficulty of having no constitutional mode of expression and agitation, no whip, so to speak, by which they could drive on the mass of the people. The great majority were possessed of a



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deadening lethargy. The habit of submission was too strong and only under provocation of the highest excitement could the national pulse be felt.

The Progressives were mere speakers and writers, because there was nothing else to do, dreamers and theorists. Yet with it all, the most powerful factors in the creation of this national spirit were, the varied literary activities since the days of Lessing, (died 1781), the bracing up of the moral fibre by the teachings of Immanuel Kant, the strenuous intellectual life which produced not only a Goethe and a Schiller, but also a brilliant group of philosophers, historians, and jurists, together with the awakened interest and pride of the people in their own early history. The intrepid labors of many gifted minds through the press and the universities were needed to strengthen and mature their longing for national unity. If at times the excesses of these writers pall on us we must remember that these were times that tried men's souls. It is not to be wondered at that many of these writers



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The Progressives were more speakers and writers because there was nothing else to do. Orators and dramatists. Yet with all the most powerful factors in the creation of this national spirit were the varied literary activities since the days of Lessing, (died 1781), the breaking up of the moral fibre by the teachings of Immanuel Kant, the strenuous intellectual life which produced not only a Goethe and a Schiller, but also a brilliant group of philosophers, historians, and jurists together with the awakened interest and pride of the people in their own early history. The heroic labors of many gifted minds through the press and the universities were needed to strengthen and mature their longing for national unity. It is almost the excess of these writers that we must remember that these were times that tried men's souls. It is not to be wondered at that many of these writers

burned themselves out on the altar of national unity, but rather it is to be wondered at, that, seeing the apathy of their fellow citizens and the selfishness of their princes, these noble spirits should not have sometimes despaired of success.

The years following 1871 might well be called the Age of Bismark. His star had been in the ascendancy since the days of the Diet of Frankfurt where he represented the interests of Prussia. It was he who struggled with and finally outwitted Austria in this Pan-Germanic assembly. He inaugurated Prussian militarism and with it played a masterful game in European politics. His advice and leadership prevented Prussia from joining England and France in the Crimean War in 1853. Ten years later he added materially to the Prussian Territory by the Danish Prussian War. It was then that Schleswig was annexed to Prussia. Two years later, in 1866, by the victory of Königgrätz, Prussia definitely overcame Austria, and what had previously been the Hohenzollern Mark of Brandenburg was now the leading state in



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Among the fulsome and just praises which have been sung for Bismark the fact must not be overlooked that he was the incarnation of the principle which retarded the progress of Germany towards democratic freedom. With a keen insight into the national character, Bismark recognized those traits and attributes which we today call stolid. Be that as it may, Bismark's system of government gave birth to a type of "Paternalism" <sup>now</sup> unknown at that time and unparalleled even today. Out of indefinite and undefined theories he established a government which reached the zenith of effective beneficent autocracy. Should the democratic principle prevail in social life or should the reorganization of society proceed under government auspices? It is the age-old question, what are the rights of the individual against the state?



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b) Literary Background.

The year 1800 is an important one in German literary history. It is not surprising that the writers of the day should have looked with high hopes into the future. No one could gainsay the extraordinary intellectual progress of the preceeding fifty years. But who was able to predict the definite break of the nineteenth century with the traditions of the eighteenth? And who could have foretold that the cosmopolitan classicism, which reached its culmination in the circle at Weimar, was so soon to be vanquished by a revival of individualism, less excessive and turbulent, to be sure, than the "Sturm und Drang" of the youthful Goethe and Schiller but none the less hostile to the classic concept? The century of enlightenment gave place to a century of Romanticism.

The economic interpretation of the Romantic Age and its literature is a rather hopeless and thankless task. Lasting literature is a matter of genius which is innate and, unlike talent, cannot be acquired. Since genius defies explanation



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we cannot catalogue it according to historical formulae. The political and social events of the time explain only some of the literature. The Romanticists looked at human life as merely one phase of an all inclusive nature. The brotherhood of all things animate or inanimate summed up in one term, - - nature; it was the northstar by which they steered their course. The regeneration of mankind depended on revivifying the sense of oneness with all nature. Naturally enough, one of the immediate results of this idea was a highly stimulated historical sense. The more scientifically minded, as for example the brothers Grimm and Schlegel, laid the corner stone for the methodic study of comparative philology and German antiquity, and thus rekindled interest in the historic past.

Medieval Germany afforded the setting and motivated the plot for many a Romanticist. To be sure, we find sham mysticism, erotic sentimentality, and maudlin rhetoric, but the shield also has its reverse side. The universities of Berlin and Bonn, the science of philology, history, the study of nature, and of foreign



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literature in translation, the music of Wagner, Liszt, and Brahms were all produced by men who wrote and thought during the Romantic Age.

There were Romanticists, subjective, individualistic, searching after a "blue flower" when the meadows ran with the blood of men, shed by Napoleon's soldiers; mystical dreamers, disporting themselves in Arcadia and Utopia. Some brought to life the glory that was Antiquity, and measured everything by aesthetic criticism. A. W. Schlegel and his wife translated Shakespeare into German verse. There are those who claim that the Schlegels gave a regrettable Romantic tint to the German translation which the original did not possess. However, this debatable point does not detract from the immense popularity of Shakespeare with the German reading public. The Schlegels contributed an immeasurable service to German Literature when they reproduced the spirit and atmosphere of our great Elizabethan poet.

The one branch of literature in which the Romanticists failed was drama. It made exacting



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technical demands to which the Romantic nature was not equal. And it is significant that the greatest dramatist of this age cannot be ranged with any of these writers, Heinrich v. Kleist, whose life was the epitome of the Romantic, but whose works are those of an uncompromising idealist. His masterpieces spring from the indignant patriotic wrath which was stirred up by the Napoleonic invasions.

German Romanticism was an intellectual movement, associated closely with the Universities, and first dominated by small groups at Jena, Heidelberg, and Berlin. There was an overemphasis on the mystic and unreal, and an extravagant indulgence in the supernatural. In their private lives there was a laxity of morality, which fitted ill with the noticeable trend toward asceticism.

By 1830 Romanticism as a movement had about stagnated and the reaction which set in swept away the "blue flower", fairy tales, legends, dreams and premonitions. These new writers,



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the younger brothers of the Romanticists, revolted against the fantastic and untrue. They called themselves "Young Germany". They employed literature in the service of utilitarian and largely practical ends. The nation became politically minded, and the newspaper became a power. The wistful spirituality of the previous age disappeared. German authors turned from medieval poetry and abstract theory to the social questions of the moment. The "July Revolution" (1830), afforded these patriots the incentive to organize the "Burschenschaften" which became mere revolutionary clubs. The movement is of little importance in itself. It had no well defined purposes or ideals, and its literature presents the most curious contrasts: nationalism and cosmopolitanism, social morality and individual license, genuine piety and hard-boiled cynicism. The most gifted writer who belonged to this group, or at least associated with them, was Heinrich Heine.



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He was primarily a lyricist but Germany has not produced his peer in cynicism and satire.

As the clouds of the Revolution of '48 cleared we see little literature of lasting merit. Hebbel and Grillparzer, of course, are brilliant exceptions, but both of them remained in comparative obscurity until the charged atmosphere cleared. The anthologies of the times contain, to be sure, hundreds of examples of the so called revolutionary lyric, for the most part, virulent and verbose. But political poetry always ages quickly. At least they fulfilled the purposes for which they were written. The period between 1848 and 1870 is not devoid of outstanding and original talent, but that talent was not appreciated until a later time. The impression which this age leaves on us today is one of mediocrity.

This stagnation lasted until the Franco-Prussian War brought a new incentive to bear on German Literature.



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c) Dramatic Background.

Among the Romanticists none are remembered today for their contributions to German drama as such. They were unable to confine their genius within the limits which dramatic art demanded. And yet seeds were planted in this Romantic Era which were to bear fruit in the years to come. The brothers Schlegel are the focal points, yet between them they produced but two plays, "Alarcos" (1802), and "Ion" (1803), both were complete failures. A. W. Schlegel translated sixteen plays of Shakespeare in such a masterful style that they are considered the greatest achievement since Luther's Bible. A. W. Schlegel in his lectures on "Dramatic Art and Literature" (1808) laid the foundation of an historical interpretation which placed modern art on an equality with the Classic. This widely known book has become very important as a basis of historical judgment; and the main lines of its division are still considered



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authoritative today.

The great changes in the political and social life found no echo on the German stage. The theatre became more and more the home of the sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. German drama fared little better under the short lived regime of the Young Germans. They, at least, perceived the hopelessness of false idealism and visionary capriciousness of the Romantic group.

Ludolf Weinbarg, the aesthetic authority of the Young Germans, insisted on the treatment of subject true to life, and emphasized the importance of the present in dramatic composition. His, however, was a voice in the wilderness, for all progressive movements seemed to have died out. The old worn out fields were cultivated with ever decreasing profit. The petrified forms resisted all attempts at improvement. The cultivation of formal beauty was the summum bonum.

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Victor Hugo and Dumas père as the models.

A fine outer polish, the greatest skill in all that was technical, complete lack of any deep emotion, exciting intrigues carried out at the cost of Reality, were the chief contributions from France to German drama. It was thoroughly superficial, graceful, and entertaining.

Everything reflecting the spirit of the age was carefully avoided as dangerous and hostile to Art. Middle Class drama became mere farce, losing the worthy character with which Kleist and Hebbel had endowed class consciousness and social differences. Morality was expressed in terms of middle class ethics, and middle class comedy degenerated into a low, vulgar farce.

The two most revivifying stimulants which the drama received took place within two years of one another. In 1874 the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen sent his court players "on circuit" and in 1876 Richard Wagner established his Bayreuth festivals.



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The effect of this first stimulant was important. The Meiningen's first play in Berlin was "Julius Caesar". The impression of this drama, which had long been known on the German boards, was due to the carrying out of definite principles, - - everything must be subordinated to the purposes of the poet, and this was to be accomplished by the use of all the allied arts of the theatre and the highest stage technique. The Meinings provided suitable setting for each drama and conscientiously observed the historical setting in scenery and costume.

The second, and not less important, precept of the Meiningen was the obliteration of the so-called "Star" system. All the actors from the highest to the lowest had to place themselves unreservedly in the hands of the producer, to take whatever role made for the unity of the individual drama. Thus we found a rounding of the whole, a completeness never found before and seldom seen even today.

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above all, of great advantage in the production of Schiller's dramas. The passionate energy of the great mass scenes, of "Die Räuber", "Wallenstein", "Die Jungfrau von Orleans", assumed an artistic completeness never before known. For seventeen years, from 1874 to 1890, the players were "on the road". They displayed their art most successfully in Schiller's and Shakespeare's dramas, but they also experimented with Ibsen, Björnson, and Lindner.



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with Ibsen, Björnson, and Lindber.

II. Ernst v. Wildenbruch (1843-1910)

a) Biographical Sketch.

In 1880 the Meiningen produced "Die Karolinger" of Ernst von Wildenbruch. The success of this play was far beyond expectation. The author had gained some fame by his two poems, "Dionville" (1874) and "Sedan" (1875), but now he was hailed as a new Schiller.

In the light of his future plays Wildenbruch's life and family are not devoid of interest. He is a descendant of the princely house of Hohenzollern whose poet laureate he became. Prince Louis Ferdinand, that Prussian Alcibiades, who fell in 1806 at Saalfeld, had two children, a son and a daughter, by the daughter of a merchant named Fromme. These children were given the name Wildenbruch, after the name of the locality near which they were born. The daughter, Blanka, became a lady of the court, and the son, Ludwig, attained high position in the Diplomatic Service. He was the father of Ernst von Wildenbruch, who was born February 3, 1845 in Beirut, Turkey, where his father was stationed as Consul-General.



Ernst v. Widenbruch (1843-1910)

II.

a) Biographical sketch.

In 1843 the Widenbruchs produced the

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Prince Louis Ferdinand, that Russian ally,

who fell in 1806 at Eylau, had two children,

a son and a daughter, by the daughter of a

merchant named Fromme. These children were given

the name Widenbruch, after the name of the

locality near which they were born. The daughter,

Elisabeth, became a lady of the court, and the son,

Ernst, attained high position in the diplomatic

service. He was the father of Ernst von Widenbruch,

who was born February 3, 1843 in Berlin, Turkey.

where his father was stationed as Consul-General.

When he was three years old his father was recalled and sent on a short diplomatic mission. The boy was left in Berlin and there witnessed the Revolution of 1848. This, naturally enough, left an indelible imprint on the boy and is important in view of his future development. His father's next post was the embassy at Athens, where Ernst played in the shadow of the Acropolis. The effect of this environment occurs again and again in Wildenbruch's work and the Orient accounts for much of the bizarre in him. His mother died early in his life so he was sent back to Germany where he was enrolled in the Kadet Haus in Potsdam. He fought with the Reserve Guards at Königgrätz, and then resigned from the army and devoted himself to the law. While at the University of Berlin he began the systematic reading of the chief Romantic writers, among them, Lenz, Klinger, Tieck, E.T.A. Hoffmann, and Z. Werner.

When the Franco-Prussian War broke out Wildenbruch was assigned to a reserve battalion and so took no active part in the war. His fervent patriotic



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no active part in the war. His fervent patriotic

sentiments glowed at the news from Versailles and the fulfilment of Prussian ascendancy. Wildenbruch settled in Frankfurt a. M. after the war and tried to devote himself to law. But the dramatic urge was too strong, and in 1877 he returned to Berlin with two plays, "Harold" and "Die Karolinger", hoping for a favorable reception.

Neither of his plays were accepted in Berlin and yet, in spite of this rebuff, Wildenbruch's first years in Berlin were ones of feverish creation. He wrote two more plays, "Der Menonit" and "Väter u. Söhne", and two volumes of tales. Wildenbruch was now thirty-two years old and he had nothing to his credit yet, excepting some old poems. In 1881 he met the Hart brothers, Julius and Heinrich, who were at that time preaching the doctrine of Zola and Flaubert of France, Ibsen in Norway, Strindberg in Sweden, Tolstoy and Dostoievsky in Russia, to the German reading public through



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their journal "Kritische Waffengänge". These men were the pioneers of Realism, and they were directly responsible for Wildenbruch's dramatic debut. Time alone has shown how far they overshot the mark.

One presentation was enough to establish Wildenbruch's popularity with the theatre-going public. (I say "theatre-going public" advisedly, for Wildenbruch's plays were never intended to be merely read.) The success which followed "Die Karolinger" caused the producers to contest with one another for his previously rejected plays, and all the dramas which had originated in the seventies were produced in the early eighties. He won the Schiller and Grillparzer Prizes in 1883, and again in 1886, for his play "Heinrich und Heinrichs Geschlecht" which opened in Berlin the same night as G. Hauptmann's "Florian Geyer".

Wildenbruch married Maria v. Weber, the grand-daughter of the famous composer of



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"Der Freischütz". Wildenbruch was regarded by the German people as an "Eckart", ever ready with encouragements and admonishings in public life, and so today we look back on him as the embodiment of the German consciousness at that time. He died in 1909 in Berlin, but was buried in Weimar where he had spent many of his last years. He is buried near the new Court House in Weimar, on a slight elevation, and his epitaph reads "Death is only the end of a day."

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b) Synopsis of Historical Dramas.

The complete list of Wildenbruch's historical dramas is as follows.

"Harold"

"Der Menonit"

"Die Karolinger"

"Väter u. Söhne"

"Christoph Marlow"

"Das Neue Gebot"

"Heinrich und Heinrichs Geschlecht"

"Die Tochter des Erasmus"

"König Laurin"

"Die Lieder des Euripides"

"Die Rabensteinerin"

"Ermanarich"

"Der deutsche König"

Hohenzollern Historien

"Die Quitzows"

"Der Generalfeldoberst"

"Der Neue Herr"

We will discuss the more important plays in the order in which they were written.



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"Die Tochter des Bräutigams"

"König Lear"

"Die Lieder des Kriegers"

"Die Habsburger"

"Lorenz"

"Der deutsche König"

Hochzeitliche Klagen

"Die Geliebten"

"Der Generalmajor"

"Der Neue Herr"

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"Harold"

A tragedy in five acts.

First performed in Hanover in 1882.

The action of the play takes place:

Act I - Dover

Act II - Rouen and London

Act III - Rouen

Act IV - London

Act V - Rouen and Hastings

Time - circa 1066

Edward the Confessor is the weak and vacillating king of England with Norman sympathies which antagonize his English subjects. The leadership of the English party has fallen, through the death of Duke Godwin of Wessex, to his oldest son Harold.

The first act of the play is given over to the political orientation of the characters into Norman and English. We see Edward travelling down to Dover with a



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Norman entourage to meet the Norman Duke William. Harold is master of his castle in Wessex, which is that part of England which lies closest to the continent. Edward, as king of England, requests Harold to open his castle to the Norman duke. This Harold refuses to do, upbraiding the king for his Norman sympathies, and showing him the sufferings of the citizens of Dover at the hands of the Norman knights. William arrives in the midst of the excitement and his supporters demand the person of Wulfnot, the brother of Harold as a pledge of Harold's good conduct. Edward weakly consents to have the Normans take Wulfnot as a hostage home with them.

The second act is in Rouen, the home of the Norman duke. William and his courtiers arrive home and are greeted by Adele, who is immediately charmed by the fair haired hostage, Wulfnot. The second part of this act is not important in the narrative thread



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of the story and only serves to show the unrest of the English under the Norman yoke, and the prominence of Harold in English affairs.

The third act is in Rouen and deals with the arrival of Harold to get his brother Wulfnot. Wulfnot has told Adele so much about Harold that we are quite prepared for the inevitable, - - Harold falls in love with Adele, and after a tournament confesses his love. William offers no objection to this marriage for he sees an opportunity of eliminating Harold as an active opponent to the Norman conquest of England. During the subsequent celebrations William asks Harold to swear an oath to assist William in all those things which Edward has promised him. Harold with very few doubts, consents and then learns that he has sworn to assist William in the conquest of England after Edward's death.

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Realizing the gravity of his act, Harold

makes his way to England and his worst fears are confirmed in the admission of Edward the Confessor. Edward in despair at his just wrath turns over the crown of England to him.

Now the scene changes to Rouen and the curtain rises on a narrow high-arched room and on a bed lies the lifeless form of Wulfnot. Adele enters and discovers the body and in a half mad frenzy predicts the battle of Hastings and the death of Harold.

The scene changes in a "Gewittersturm" and it is dusk on the field at Hastings. The followers of Harold are looking for his body among the dead, when they meet William the Norman. William forbids them to take the body until a herald appears announcing the death of Adele. When he learns that Adele died with Harold's name on her lips, he gives Harold's body to the Saxons.



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The scene changes in a "Gestaltstunde"  
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This play is reminiscent of "Die Karolinger" in the historical importance of its subject matter. The drama is conceived on a huge scale and in its proportions it reminds us of Wagner's music dramas. The main conflict is, of course, between Norman and Saxon, but the importance of the play rests in the inner and personal conflict of Harold.

With the introduction of the "Eid" in the climax scene, (Act III Scene II), we have the inner conflict, the solution of which is bound to lead Harold to doom. In this scene Wildenbruch has taken some liberties with strict historical truth. The records of the time in relating this incident, state that Harold was shipwrecked on the Norman coast and that William would not let him return to England until he had sworn a solemn oath of vassalage to the duke. Wildenbruch, in distorting these facts and reproducing the "Eid" motive, is trying to justify Harold's subsequent acceptance of the English crown.



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Wildenbruch's purpose was purely dramatic and we doubt whether he had any interest or saw any importance in the nice question of ethical responsibility.

Harold's actions subsequent to the "Eid" demands an appreciation of the medieval concept of an oath. If we accept the Marxian materialistic theory of history, we must admit the absolutism of the feudal system in church and state. Thus Harold's oath is irrevocable and the importance of the personal conflict depends upon the weight which we place on the irrevocability of that oath. Harold is confronted on the one hand with eternal damnation if he breaks his oath, and on the other with self damnation if he disregards his own love of country. In other words, the problem is greater than the individual.

Although Wildenbruch places Harold in a dilemma, the outcome is a foregone conclusion.



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dilemma, the outcome is a foregone conclusion.

Wildenbruch could not treat this conflict otherwise. We know that Harold will choose love of country and thus suffer eternal damnation. The inner conflict in "Harold" is far more serious than in Wildenbruch's other plays. Konrad Quitzow in "Die Quitzow", and Heinrich Bergmann in "Väter und Söhne" are both sacrificed, like Harold on the altar of Nationalism, but both Konrad Quitzow and Heinrich Bergmann redeem themselves in death, while Harold, although redeemed in the eyes of mankind, is damned in the eyes of heaven.

The last act of "Harold" does not come up to our expectations. To begin with, the stage directions are so conventional that they seem almost nondescript. We are first introduced to the result of the conflict between Norman and Saxon, - - the death of Wulfnot and then of Adele, and then to the result of the inner conflict of Harold, - - the death of Harold on the field at Hastings.



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result of the inner conflict of Harold, --  
the death of Harold on the field at Hastings.

The change of setting between the first scene, Rouen, to the second, Hastings, is accomplished by means of a "Gewittersturm". The sequence of the play is not distorted and we are prepared for the fulfilment of Adele's direful utterances. The followers of Harold are looking for his body, and when they find it, the Norman duke William appears. We are given no reason for his appearance or for his subsequent order forbidding the removal of the body. Then the deus ex machina foretold by the "Gewittersturm" takes place and William learns of Adele's death.

The deaths of Adele and Wulfnot seem to us like piling Pelion on Ossa. The unity of the play did not require them, they were outside the main conflict and strengthen the conviction that Wildenbruch was more interested in the moment than in the whole, in the theatric rather than in the dramatic.



The change of setting between the first scene, London, to the second, Hastings, is accomplished by means of a "Gevesterturm". The sequence of the play is not distorted and we are prepared for the fulfillment of Abels' divine mission. The followers of Harold are looking for his body, and when they find it, the Norman Duke William appears. He is given no reason for his appearance or for his subsequent order forbidding the removal of the body. Then the scene ex machina foretold by the "Gevesterturm" takes place and William learns of Abels' death.

The death of Abels and Wilfrid seem to us like a living fiction on a stage. The only of the play did not require them, they were outside the main conflict and strengthen the conviction that Wilfrid was more interested in the moment than in the whole, in the theatre rather than in the dramatic.

"Der Menonit"

A tragedy in four acts.

First performed in Frankfurt a. M. in 1881.

The action of the play takes place about 1809.

Setting - Danzig

Waldermar, the elder of the Mennonite sect, had one daughter, Maria, and a foster-son, Reinhold. The son was sent by his father out into the world to strengthen him in his faith and loyalty to the Mennonite cause. The action opens with Waldermar pledging the hand of his daughter, Maria, to Mathias, a leading figure in the Mennonite community, fanatical, unscrupulous, and many years older than the girl. Maria acquiesces unwillingly for she still remembers Reinhold, who comes back that very day. He recalls memories of their earlier devotion, and then learns of Maria's engagement to Mathias. He leaves in a huff, but returns shortly after to find that Maria is being accosted by



"Der Memnonide"

A tragedy in four acts.

First performed in Frankfurt a. M. in 1881.

The action of the play takes place about 1800.

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He recalls memories of their earlier  
devotion, and then learns of Maria's  
engagement to Mathias. He leaves in a  
huff, but returns shortly after to  
find that Maria is being escorted by

two officers from the French garrison at Danzig, while Mathias stands idly by. Reinhold attacks the officers, causing a duel, a proceeding contrary to the Mennonite faith. Mathias misrepresents the whole affair to Waldermar, claiming Maria's defense for himself, and that Reinhold's part was due to his belligerence. Waldermar, in his desire to break off the duel, promises Reinhold that he may marry Maria if he will withdraw. Reinhold grudgingly consents. However the community of Mennonites will not agree to the marriage so he loses both the duel and the girl. Reinhold then meets an emissary of Major von Schill who is trying to stir up feeling against the French invaders. This turns out disastrously, and as Reinhold and Maria are trying to escape they are caught by the French, and Maria dies trying to save her lover, who, as the curtain falls, is led away to Danzig



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to execution.

This play contains much that is characteristic of Wildenbruch. The historical background, while interesting in itself, is not essential to the development of the drama. The characters, particularly Reinhold, have an allegorical meaning. Wildenbruch, writing at the climax of the Prussian ascendancy, wished to show the sacrifice and suffering it had cost, and so Reinhold is endowed with the stirring noble aspirations of the German youth. The conflict, therefore, is between narrow, restrictive, reactionary rules of the Mennonite community and the great national and individual "Sturm und Drang", at the stirring times of the Wars of the Liberators.

We can forgive Wildenbruch many of his stock-in-trade dramatic tricks, the deus ex machina appearance of Reinhold, five minutes after the engagement of Maria and Mathias, the oaths, duels, and signs for this play show



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quite clearly the great ability Wildenbruch possessed as a moving dramatist. The plot is almost perfect. The characters are far better than in "Die Karolinger". To be sure, they have a bombastic verbosity, but it seems to suit the youthful characters in their evolution through their "Sturm und Drang". However the message of Major von Schill, in the mouth of a simple Westphalian farmer,

"Hörst Du die Bäume flüsternd  
sich bewegen?

Du meinst es sei der Wind,

Du irrest Dich,

Die Seufzer sind es,  
welche Deutschland stöhnt,

Siehst Du die Tropfen  
perlen hier im Gras?

Du meinst es sei der Tau - -

Du irrest Dich,

Die Thränen sind es,

welche Deutschland weint - -.

Act III, Scene II.

sounds altogether too rhetorical, and we feel that Wildenbruch himself, in the height of passion, speaks these lines.



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the mouth of a single Neapolitan farmer,

"Hörst Du die Stimme Tinsens?  
Ist das Wasser?  
Du meinst es ist der Wind.  
Du irrst dich.  
Die Tinsens sind es.  
Welche Deutschland tönt?  
Ist das die Tinsens?  
Gibst Du die Tinsens?  
Du meinst es ist der Ton -  
Du irrst dich.  
Die Tinsens sind es.  
Welche Deutschland tönt -  
Ach! Ill, Scene II.

sounds altogether too rhetorical, and we feel  
that Wildenbruch himself, in the height of  
passion, speaks these lines.

"Die Karolinger"

A tragedy in four acts.

First performed in Meiningen in 1881.

The action of the play takes place about 833.

Setting - Worms

The aging Emperor Ludwig the Pious is attempting to settle upon a successor to the Frankish crown. He has two sons by an earlier marriage, Ludwig and Lothar, who however left the Frankish court when their father married a second time. His bride was the youthful Judith Welf by whom he had a son, Karl, who is about sixteen years old at the time of the play. Bernhard of Barcelona, an adventurous noble, is home from a Moorish campaign in company with a Moorish princess who fell in love with him and saved him from death in her father's dominions. Her name is Hamatelliwa and she has with her a slave, Abdullah. Fired with ambition, Bernhard arrives in Worms and soon detects Judith's machinations to further the



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First performed in Weimarer in 1881.

The action of the play takes place about 1833.

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The young Emperor Ludwig the Pious is attempting to settle upon a successor to the Frankish crown. He has two sons by an earlier marriage, Ludwig and Robert, who however left the Frankish court when their father married a second time. His bride was the youthful Judith. Half by then he had a son, Karl, who is about sixteen years old at the time of the play. Bernhard of Barcelona, an adventurous noble, is home from a Moorish campaign in company with a Moorish princess who fell in love with him and saved him from death in her father's dominions. Her name is Kusselina and she has with her a slave, Abdullah. Killed with accident, Bernhard arrives in Worms and soon detects Judith's machinations to further the

cause of her son Karl. Bernhard offers the queen his assistance, and shortly after they fall in love with each other. Hamatelliwa observes the pair in the garden, and reproaches Bernhard for his unfaithfulness. Bernhard, thinking that Hamatelliwa overheard his plan for disposing of the Emperor, stabs her dead. Bernhard now requests Abdullah to concoct an Eastern poison, which he administers to the Emperor. Abdullah, incensed at the murder of his mistress, accuses Bernhard before the Frankish nobles of the death of the Emperor. They, in their just wrath, fall upon him and kill him.

This first play of Wildenbruch's shows all the good points and all the bad points of his subsequent dramas. The plot, conceived on an enormous scale, deals with the dissolution of the great empire of Charles the Great, during the reign of his son, Ludwig the Pious. With this dissolution began the separation of France and Germany. Ludwig's reign had begun



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most auspiciously, and the dissensions and disasters which followed can be traced to the marriage of Ludwig and Judith, the Bavarian princess.

This plot unrolls before us without a pause, at a breath taking pace over gaps and improbabilities to an end that is not worthy of the beginning. The interweaving of the two leading motives, Bernhard's lust for power and lust for Judith mutually detract from the unity of the development. Bernhard's confession of his intention to poison the Emperor to his deadly enemy, the Moor, Abdullah, is almost an unpardonable improbability. A plot which was so well adapted to treatment on a magnificent scale thus becomes a mere family intrigue. And even then the opposing characters are so unequally treated; on the one hand we have Judith representing the interests of her son Karl, and on the other we have the sons of Ludwig by his first wife, Ludwig and Lothar. Judith



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merely speaks her lines, is perfectly colorless and leaves us unmoved. The sons seem to drop out of the picture altogether until the last act when they come to life to slay Bernhard. If we condemn the above characters as too "farbelos" we must also admit that Bernhard is too "grell". He seems to rush headlong through the play, clanking a hollow sword and beating a blatant drum.

Wildenbruch's methods of dramatic exposition show here in his first play the fault which he never overcame, that of bulging construction. The play is full of conflicts which mutually detract.

1.) We have the conflict between father and son, i.e., the conflict between the Emperor and his two sons, Ludwig and Lothar, over the division of the empire.

2.) We have the conflict between Judith and Ludwig and Lothar in the battle for her son's right to the succession.

3.) We have the conflict between Hamatelliwa



merely speaks her lines, is perfectly colorless and leaves us unmoved. The scene seems to drop out of the picture altogether until the last act when they come to life to slay Bernhard. If we condemn the above characters as too "Lutheran" we must also admit that Bernhard is too "Greek". He seems to rush headlong through the play, slaying a hollow sword and beating a distant drum.

Wittenberg's methods of dramatic exposition show here in his first play the fault which he never overcame, that of being too direct. The play is full of conflicts which mutually detract.

1.) We have the conflict between father and son, i.e., the conflict between the Emperor and his two sons, Ludwig and John, over the division of the empire.

2.) We have the conflict between Ludwig and John and John in the battle for her son's right to the succession.

3.) We have the conflict between Maximilian

and Bernhard.

4.) We have the conflict between Judith and Bernhard.

5.) We have the conflict between Bernhard's ambition and his love for Judith.

6.) Finally, we have the conflict between mother and son, that is, between Judith and Karl when he discovers his mother's clandestine affair with Bernhard.

The multiplicity of conflicts beclouds the main issue and none stands out clearly. We get the idea of impending disaster and feel the force of Wildenbruch's theatrical ability, but all his dramas lack life and force when off the stage. The characters exist only for the moment, and their language with its tempestuous "Klang" is, in the main, shallow and meaningless.



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"Väter und Söhne"

A play in five acts

First performed in Breslau in 1881.

The action of the first two acts is in Küstrin in 1806.

The last three are in Berlin in 1813.

Valentine Bergmann was a village schoolmaster who had one son, Heinrich. An older son, Wilhelm, had been shot at dawn by a firing squad years before for a petty infringement of the military ordinances by the strict Prussian commandant, von Ingersleben. The play opens with the besieging of ~~Kustrin~~ Küstrin by the Napoleonic troops, whose leaders were quartered in the house of Bergmann. Bergmann overhears the plans for the capture of the city, and so misrepresents them to the Prussian leader, von Ingersleben, that he turns over the city and fort to the French, who have only one regiment. With dishonor staring him



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and fort to the French, who have only one

regiment. With almost starting him

in the face, Ingersleben shoots himself, and his son Ferdinand is suspected of selling the city to the French. Thus Bergmann is revenged on the family of von Ingersleben.

The second part of the play opens in Berlin during the French occupation of the city. Heinrich has spent the intervening years as a student at Halle, and Ferdinand at the French prison of Monte Louis. Ferdinand at last escapes and returns to Berlin to find his mother and sweetheart. He is captured and brought to Heinrich Bergmann for identification. Heinrich decides that the revenge has gone far enough, and denies that he recognizes Ferdinand. Heinrich now leads him to his family, and before his Prussian comrades confesses his part in the scheme of revenge. Ferdinand von Ingersleben thus regains his honor and Heinrich Bergmann loses his. In the meantime the Prussians,



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under General von Bülow, succeed in driving the French from Berlin. The Bergmanns, father and son, now stand in danger of their lives as French spies. Ferdinand von Ingersleben however, realizes the sacrifices that Heinrich has made for his sake, and saves him, and also offers him a post in his regiment.

The final curtain finds Heinrich mortally wounded in body, but his honor is redeemed and his spirit sings the praises of the Vaterland, and over him weep the surviving members of the von Ingersleben family.

This play, with the same historical background, is a more important work than "Der Menonit". With this play Wildenbruch won for himself the title of "The Poet of Youth". The play literally glows with patriotic fervor. The revenge motive is merely introduced to show the extreme to which a noble German youth will go when enkindled with patriotic fire to rectify



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embittered with patriotic fire to rectify

the sins of his father. We can well imagine the effect of this play on the German audiences of the eighties, intoxicated as they were with the fresh victories of the Franco-Prussian War.

This play shows quite clearly Wildenbruch's power of dramatic contrast. In the first act we see the dying age of provincialism, with its egotism, cruelty and weaknesses, and in the next we see the effects of the arising age of Nationalism, with its aspirations of a patriotic people for self expression.

Under Wildenbruch's treatment Valentine Bergmann becomes too much of a monster; twenty years have passed since the death of his first son, a second was born to bless him, and one in whom the father could recognize the one he had lost, and yet he is still unreconciled to fate, and still bitterly expresses his enmity to the Vaterland.

Wildenbruch's power of language carries us over many improbabilities, among which is



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Widenbrock's power of language carries us  
over many improbabilities, among which is

the fact that Heinrich could have become a member of the French Secret Service without knowing what it was all about. Another stumbling block to the plausibility of the play is the fact that Heinrich, the son of a poor village schoolmaster, could spend seven years in affluence at the University of Halle.

These faults, for they are faults, do not, however, detract from the effectiveness of the play. The action of the play overcomes these technical weaknesses. The language of the play admirably fits in with this exalted action, and we feel the outraged sense of justice which Valentine suffered in his oldest son's death. This feeling of frustration of justice is one of H. v. Kleist's most powerful motives. We can feel the discouragement that forces von Ingersleben to shoot himself when we read such lines as these, (speaking of Frederick the Great):



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"Er war der grosse Genius  
seiner Tage,  
Und uns verschlingt der Genius  
unsrer Zeit,  
Denn jede Zeit hat ihren  
grossen Mann,  
Dem seine Zeitgenossen  
dienen müssen  
Die Einen willig, Andere  
durch Zwang,  
Wir haben's leider ungeschickt  
getroffen,  
Dass wir auf Seiten der  
Gezwungenen stehn."

Act II, Scene I



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Denn jede Zeit hat ihren  
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Die Einen willig, Andere  
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Wir haben's leider ungeschickt  
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Act II. Scene I

"Die Quitzows"

A play in four acts

First performed by royal command in Berlin in 1888.

The action takes place in Berlin and Burg Freisach.

Time - 1415

The city of Berlin is under the protection of the Burggraf of Nürnberg, Friedrich Hohenzollern, who, however, has left it to defend itself against marauding robber barons. As the refugees from the sacked city of Strassburg straggle in for succor, the townspeople of Berlin decide to put themselves under the protection of Dietrich v. Quitzow, one of the most powerful nobles of the Mark.

Dietrich's brother Kanrad, a student in the city of Berlin, realizes the desperate need of the people for a strong government to put down the marauding barons. Dietrich agrees to lead the people and in his acceptance speech insults the mayor of Strassburg, Thomas



"Die Getreuen"

A play in four acts

First performed by royal command in Berlin in 1888.  
The action takes place in Berlin and Burg Freuden.

Time - 1410

The city of Berlin is under the  
protection of the Burggraf of Brandenburg.  
Friedrich Hohenstaufen, who, however, has  
lost it to defend itself against marauding  
robber barons. As the refugees from the  
sacked city of Brandenburg struggle in for  
asylum, the townsmen of Berlin decide to  
put themselves under the protection of  
Dietrich v. Goltzow, one of the most  
powerful nobles of the Mark.  
Dietrich's brother Konrad, a student in  
the city of Berlin, realizes the desperate  
need of the people for a strong government  
to put down the marauding barons. Dietrich  
agrees to lead the people and in his acceptance  
speech invites the mayor of Brandenburg, Thomas

Wims and even claps him into the Quitzow dungeon at Freisack. Agnes, the daughter of Thomas Wims, and even his own brother Konrad, intercedes with Dietrich in vain.

The imprisonment of Thomas Wims turns the populace of Berlin against Dietrich who retires to his fortress. Friedrich v. Hohenzollern, at last aware of the plight of his people, comes to their succor and attacks the fortress of the Quitzows. Konrad Quitzow, who places the ties of country above those of blood, refuses to assist his brother in defense of the castle. Dietrich orders the burgemaster, Thomas Wims, to be killed and his body handed over to the attacking party. Konrad, to save Wims, kills his brother but while doing this is mortally wounded, and, as the curtain falls, the brothers breathe their last and their castle crumbles under the fire of the little known cannon.

This play is the most important of the so called Hohenzollern dramas. Here Wildenbruch



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This play is the most important of the  
so called Hohenhausen dramas. Here Wittenberg

furbishes up the myths and lore of the Hohenzollerns and presents them in glowing colors to, and at the command of, the all-powerful Margraf v. Brandenburg, then gloriously reigning.

The play shows, however, Wildenbruch's weakness in characterization although the whole piece breathes with sincere enthusiasm for his subject. The failure lies in the all pervading conviction that all opposition to the mission of the Hohenzollern is futile. By the end of the first act we are confident that Dietrich Quitzow is not the man to lead the German people. The complete dramatis personae seem to be warped into a subordinate position in relation to Friedrich Hohenzollern.

Nationalism was burning so strongly in the bosom of Wildenbruch that he was not guided by the precepts of his predecessors to use the stage to supplement and invigorate the teachings of history. His sole urge in writing the Hohenzollern dramas was love and veneration for



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Hohenstaufen drama was love and veneration for

that race which made Brandenburg the cradle of the German Empire.

Wildenbruch shows one of his rare submissions to the modern Naturalistic School in this play. It is a regrettable error of taste and judgment that he allowed the modern Berlin dialect to find place in a historical drama of the fifteenth century. This was an attempt on Wildenbruch's part to allign himself with the contemporaneous writers.

This submission to the modernists with their naturalistic tendencies did not exert a good influence on Wildenbruch. He, in reality, belonged solely to what we might call the Traditionalists. The path led from Schiller through the Young German Movement to him. He possessed the faculty of luxurious flowing speech so characteristic of Schiller that he was more than once called a modernized Schiller. He shows the influence of the Young German Party in his liberalism and intense nationalism.

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waning century, Sudermann and Hauptmann, is shown only slightly in a struggle for the ideal values of life and the problems of ethical individuality. Dietrich, in his play, shows quite clearly the struggle of the individual character between that which is and that which is to be.



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### III. CONCLUSION.

Why did Wildenbruch not become the forerunner of a new dramatic literature? Why did the stream of literature rush by him, leaving him isolated and marooned? His plays were all motivated by the highest zeal, poetic enthusiasm, appeal to the patriotism of his people, and a democratic love of all classes. He might have become an Ibsen or a Hauptmann but he fell a prey to the popular adulation of Nationalism. He never outgrew his "Sturm und Drang". The same naive ardor which burns in "Die Karolinger" still smoulders in "Heinrich und Heinrichs Geschlecht".

Wildenbruch did not delve into the past to recover facts of history, but rather to revivify his own age basking, as it were, in the somniferous indifference to the victories of 1870. He sought his ideals in the past and endeavored to represent these ideals as portents of modern achievements or as



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symbols of modern conditions.

The reading of Wildenbruch's plays brings two defects to light, one of dramatic structure and the other of characterization. Select any play as we will, we find in it an interesting, effective exposition of a conflict, the solution of which we are keyed up to see solved. There is a period of tense suspense, and then in the second or third act new material is introduced to distract the attention, so that at the end we have a mass of excessively theatrical rather than dramatic material. The solution is never quite worthy of the first act. For this, Wildenbruch has won for himself the dubious distinction of being a master of the first act. This straight line development of a plot is one of the greatest and rarest gifts of a dramatist, even the plays of Heinrich v. Kleist and Shakespeare are not structurally



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Kleist and Schlegel are not strikingly

perfect. We do censure Wildenbruch however for his subordination of the real unity of a play to its dramatic effectiveness. Wildenbruch thinks only of the moment, each play has three or four truly dramatic high spots. The development as it proceeds from the first act bulges out with superfluous matter and the essential warp and woof of the entire dramatic fabric tends to separate.

Wildenbruch's second defect is that of characterization. Wildenbruch himself must have been aware of this defect for he cluttered up his plays with masses of people and few individual characters stand out against this Meissonier-like background. This defect shows itself in his inability to create living creatures, creatures who have an existence off the boards. They live a pseudo life, blatant and colorful on the stage, but off the stage they disappear. Verbosity, the strongest characteristic



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 Verboosly, the strongest characteristic

of Wildenbruch's style, affects the auditor for the moment but leaves no lasting impression.

Shortly after Wildenbruch's death Gottfried Keller wrote:

"They (Wildenbruch's plays) make an impression as if his deceased colleague Heinrich v. Kleist had come to life again and were writing with a stout heart."

Keller called Wildenbruch a "sehr liebenswürdiger" man whose dramas would probably develop still more. These developments have not been borne out because the prometh<sup>e</sup>an fire which Wildenbruch felt he had was only a flickering flame. It would seem as if Wildenbruch had written while in the throes of an emotion and not after it. We hear too much of the storm in Wildenbruch's soul and not enough of that in the souls of his characters. Wildenbruch's characters are simply costume. They are not individualized figures, they



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lack flesh and blood. They respond like marionettes to his touch.

Looking back now on the last quarter of the nineteenth century with its great material and economic progress, we find that the lasting literature of its day was that of revolt, revolt against tradition, restraint, precedent. We know that the artists, writers, thinkers, turned from their own age, which seemed gray and dull to them, to a new age, fresher and freer, which was developing before them. And Wildenbruch was not the man who could turn from the past. He fought for his ideals as valiantly and militantly as any of the younger writers fought for theirs. It was not a question so much of time, - - past and present, that separated them, as a question of ideals and the interpretation of those ideals. Wildenbruch's isolation is due to the fact that he was unable to adjust himself to the new perspective.



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